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Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
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16 September 2011

AFG103812.E

Afghanistan: Description and samples of the Tazkira booklet and the Tazkira certificate; information on security features
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official of the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan provided information on Tazkiras which was obtained from the Canadian mission in Pakistan, local resident expertise and the US Embassy in Kabul's June 2011 report on fraud prevention (Canada 6 Sept. 2011; *ibid.* 8 Sept. 2011). The High Commission official stated that Tazkira (or Taskera [US n.d.]) booklets were issued by the government until they were replaced by Tazkira certificates in 2001 (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). However, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa indicated that Tazkira booklets were issued prior to 2002, and that Tazkira certificates, also referred to as "one-paged Tazkiras," have been issued since 2002 (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011). The counsellor said that these documents serve the same purpose, but that their format has changed (*ibid.*). The official from the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan mentioned that Tazkira certificates are issued as original documents and to replace lost Tazkira booklets (Canada 6 Sept. 2011).

According to the official, not all Tazkira booklets are accepted or considered valid:

The nation-wide Tazkira Program was implemented with the reign of Daoud Khan [or Mohammad Daud] 1973-1978. With that, all previous Tazkira documents were deemed invalid. This period saw the issuance of the uniform Tazkira booklet as the sole valid Tazkira document.

Tazkira booklets that are currently accepted and considered valid are those issued during the Daoud Khan period referred to above, and those from the subsequent Communist period of 1978-1992.

Tazkira booklets were also issued through the civil war / mixed governance period of 1992-1996, and during the Taliban period from 1996-2001, however these are not considered valid or accepted as such. (*ibid.*)

Description of Tazkira Booklets

The High Commission official indicated that the following features are common to the Tazkira booklets issued during the Communist regime and the Daoud Khan (or Mohammad Daud) period:

- Double stapled;
- A regime seal is on the front cover (see the attachment "Afghanistan: Regimes and Military Service Standards");
- Printed in Pashto, including grids, seals and wet stamp;
- Clerk's handwritten additions and modifications are in Dari;
- Interior wet stamps state Ministry of Interior" in Pashto;
- A photo ID is affixed; and
- The booklet is slightly smaller than a passport (Canada 6 Sept. 2011).

According to the official, Tazkira booklets issued in the Daoud Khan period (1973-1978) present the following additional features:

- White, tan, or baby blue cover (the pigment may be distorted due to age);
- The Daoud Khan regime's seal is on the front cover (see the attachment "Afghanistan: Regimes and Military Service Standards");
- The inside pages are thin and white and printed in black ink;
- The last page contains a serial number (which can be located when reading from right to left);
- Booklets differ in number of pages, although the most common number of pages is 16; and
- "[T]he location of the government records in which the applicant's Tazkira is registered" is on page four (ibid.).

For excerpts from a Tazkira booklet from the Daoud Khan period, see the following attachments:

- Sample front cover of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period;
- Sample inside front cover of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period;
- First of two sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period;
- Second of two sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period; and
- Sample inside back cover of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period.

The High Commission official also provided the following information about some distinguishing features of Tazkira booklets from the time of the Communist regime (1978-1992):

- Pink cover (the pigment may be distorted due to age);
- The Communist regime's seal is on the front cover (see the attachment "Afghanistan: Regimes and Military Service Standards");
- The inside pages are white, with "pink inkjet colour tint and regime seal landscape";

- The last four pages are "plain white paper detailing any military service";
- The first page contains a serial number (which can be located when reading from right to left);
- Booklets differ in number of pages, although the most common number of pages is 14; and
- "[T]he location of the government records in which the applicant's Tazkira is registered" is on page 7 (Canada 6 Sept. 2011).

For excerpts from a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime, see the following attachments:

- Sample inside front cover of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime;
- First of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime;
- Second of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime;
- Third of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime; and
- Fourth of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime (white pages, military history).

The official indicated that Tazkira booklets issued during the period of the civil war and mixed governance have white covers, and that Tazkira booklets issued under the Taliban have light green covers (ibid.).

Description of Tazkira Certificates

According to the High Commission official, Tazkira certificates are only available through the Ministry of Interior, and they have looked the same since 2001 (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). However, the official stated that Tazkira certificates "are not always fully completed with biographical information and are always completed by hand" (ibid.). He also noted that "clerk entries" can vary (ibid.).

The counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan indicated that the personal information on the Tazkira certificate includes the bearer's name, father's name, grandfather's name, place and date of birth (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011). The United States (US) Department of State indicates that it is the paternal grandfather's name that appears on a Tazkira document (US n.d.). According to the High Commission official, the "place of birth" field on a Tazkira refers to the birthplace of the applicant's father (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). The official stated that "more often than not it is the applicant's father who is applying on behalf of the applicant ... as it is a male member of the applicant's immediate family who must attest to the identity of the applicant" (ibid.).

The High Commission official also provided the following information regarding the "date of birth" field on Tazkiras:

[T]he applicant's date of birth can be a guesstimate, at times expressing only the year and not the month, at times stating the month and year of birth according to the Persian solar calendar. Most common is a statement saying

the applicant was a certain age in a certain year. The calendar used is Islamic and begins in 622 AD. Thus, adding 621 years and 3 months to the month and year of birth will be the equivalent of the applicant's birthday under our Gregorian solar calendar. (ibid.)

The US Department of State corroborates the High Commission official's statement that an individual's year of birth on a Tazkira may be approximate for older individuals (US n.d.).

The High Commission official has described the Tazkira certificate as follows:

- Printed with black ink on plain white paper;
- Signed by two government employees at the front or at the back of the document;
- A serial number located at the top of the document; and
- "[T]he location of the government records in which the applicant's Tazkira is registered" is in the lower left signature field (Canada 6 Sept. 2011).

Separate copies of the original Tazkira certificate and the English version are available as attachments to this Response.

The High Commission official also stated that there are usually two wet stamp marks on the Tazkira certificate: one near the signatures and the other overlapping the photo (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). He also said that the wet stamps say the "Ministry of Interior" in Dari (ibid.). However, according to the counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa, the stamp indicates the name of the province that issued the Tazkira certificate (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011). In a follow-up telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the High Commission official indicated that there is some variance, but the seals usually say "Ministry of Interior" as well as the name of the region, province, or office of issuance (Canada 15 Sept. 2011).

The official indicated that there are inconsistencies on Tazkira certificates (ibid. 6 Sept. 2011). These include the "ink colour" and the differing quality of paper used for them (ibid.). The counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan stated that Tazkira certificates are printed on "regular paper," and that this paper is different from the paper used for booklets (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011). Another inconsistency pointed out by the High Commission official is the signatures (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). The counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan indicated that a Tazkira certificate issued in a province is signed by the chief of police, but if it is issued in Kabul, it is signed by the Ministry of Interior and the police department (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011).

English-Version Tazkira Certificates

The High Commission official stated that an English version or some other translation of a Tazkira may only be obtained by applicants who can produce an original Tazkira document (Canada 8 Sept. 2011). The English version can be produced "by a translating company in the private sector, or by government offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan proper and Embassies/Consulates outside the country" (ibid.).

If the English version is produced by the private sector,

the translator will use his business wet seal twice on the English version, once to mark the photo and again his signature. The translator requires a witness similar to how the original Tazkira requires the signature of two government witnesses The witness's signature will be stamped with his own wet seal (in the exemplar, the witness's seal is triangular). This is meant to bear witness to the accuracy of the translation. [For an example, see the attachment Sample of an English-version Tazkira certificate.] (ibid.)

If the English version is produced by government offices, wet seals for the photo and signatures are not used (ibid.).

According to the High Commission official, whether produced by the private sector or the government, once the English version is ready, "an official attestation must be made and noted. The document created in the private sector must be brought to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs along with the original Tazkira, for this purpose" (ibid.). The official further stated:

From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both the English version and original are sent interdepartmentally to an official of the Ministry of Justice for an attestation of accuracy. This done, the wet seal from the Ministry of Justice will be placed on the page (in the exemplar it is round seal at the bottom left). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will place two seals on the page at the top; the first is the rectangular box stating the date of attestation, the second is the round seal of the office where the attestation was done. [For an example, see the attachment Sample of an English-version Tazkira certificate.] (Canada 8 Sept. 2011)

According to the High Commission official, "the form and format of the English translation mirrors that of the original, but this cannot be considered an exact or a consistent replica for authentication purposes. Variations will exist in the location of the data transcribed and the quality of printing and paper" (ibid.).

Security Features

The counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan said that Tazkira certificates and booklets do not have security features (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011). However, according to the High Commission official, the security features in Tazkira documents are "mainly present through official wet seals [that] bear the name of the issuing office (Ministry of Interior)" (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). He added that these seals "seem to be stamped arbitrarily throughout the booklets" (ibid.). The official mentioned that another security feature of Tazkira documents is that the photos are overlapped by the official wet seals (ibid.). The official added that entries made in Tazkira booklets are also signed by a government official, while Tazkira certificates are signed by two government employee witnesses (ibid.).

Regarding the security features of Tazkira booklets issued during the Communist regime, the official stated that the pages inside the booklet are "tinted pink by inkjet, and landscaped with the seal of the period. This goes for all pages except the last 4 reserved for military history, which are plain white" (ibid.).

According to the High Commission official,

[h]istorically, Afghan culture has not placed emphasis on the same identity markers as is relied upon in the West. Where full and accurate names and dates and places of birth are key to establishing the identity of Western citizens, genealogy, lineage, and tribal ethnicity have been those markers used by Afghans to self-identify. Perhaps it is partially for this reason that security features on Tazkira documents are simple and as a result these documents can and are easily replicated and accessible. (ibid.)

The official further explained that "an assessment on the authenticity of a Tazkira document therefore, as with any Afghan ID document, is always made on a case by case basis at the mission and represents a weighing of several factors" (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). These factors include the following:

- How the document compares to the official exemplar for its time period - the presence and appearance of known security features, seals, and common characteristics that should be present.
- The cross-referencing of various types of ID documents that should reinforce to the applicant's Tazkira number (i.e., a driving permit booklet, a marriage certificate booklet, a passport, and / or a military service booklet). These however can be easily replaced by documents, genuine or not, properly or improperly obtained, and an applicant could produce various pieces of ID all recently issued around the same time.
- The questioning of the applicant to ascertain the accuracy of data entered into the Tazkira, (i.e. Birth date cross-referenced with dates of education, sibling birth dates etc., place and date of issue cross-referenced with the history the applicant tells, and the circumstances surrounding the reissuance of the document). (ibid.)

The counsellor at the Embassy of Afghanistan also stated that a way to authenticate Tazkira documents is to send them to the Embassy of Afghanistan where staff can look for "small things" that they are able to notice from experience (Afghanistan 24 Aug. 2011).

New Electronic National ID System

According to the High Commission official, "there is no official Tazkira 'card' to replace or complement the certificate," and the Tazkira certificate is the "only government issued national ID document" (Canada 6 Sept. 2011). However, the official stated that "internal ID cards" that "may contain reference to the owner's Tazkira" may be used by some government offices, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (ibid.). The official also stated that during the Communist era, membership cards from the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan "may have contained information from the Tazkira" (ibid.).

To the knowledge of the Canadian High Commission, Tazkiras "are not centralized and do not follow any standard pattern of sequencing or identification" (ibid. 8 Sept. 2011). The official explained that "Afghan systems for the registration of different types of documents is not centralized and not computerized. Oftentimes they are records kept locally and issued and recorded by hand as in the case of police certificates" (ibid.). The High Commission official stated that Tazkiras are therefore not numbered sequentially according to family members (ibid.).

The High Commission official indicated that "there is news that the Afghan

government is currently planning to launch and centralize the Tazkira data into one registry, and produce from this registry a Tazkira card" (ibid. 6 Sept. 2011). Plans to implement an electronic national ID system are corroborated by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of Afghanistan, which indicated in a news release published in December 2010 that the new system should "be implemented within 36 months" (Afghanistan 19 Dec. 2010).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Afghanistan. 24 August 2011. Embassy of Afghanistan in Ottawa. Telephone interview with a counsellor.

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Canada. 15 September 2011. Canadian High Commission in Pakistan. Telephone interview with an official.

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_____. 6 September 2011. Canadian High Commission in Pakistan. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

United States (US). N.d. "Afghanistan Reciprocity Schedule." <http://travel.state.gov/visa/fees/fees_5455.html?cid=8938> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2011]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral source: Attempts to contact a representative of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response.

Publications: *Human Rights Quarterly*; *The Muslim World*.

Internet sites, including: Afghan Islamic Press; British Broadcasting Corporation; Canada Border Services Agency; *Dawn*; *The Economist*; Eurasianet.org; Europa World Plus; Factiva; *Kabul Weekly*; Keesing's Documentchecker; Legislationline; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld.

Attachments

Canada. N.d.a. "Afghanistan: Regimes and Military Service Standards." Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.b. Sample front cover of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.c. Sample inside front cover of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.d. First of two sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.e. Second of two sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.f. Sample inside back cover of a Tazkira booklet from the Mohammad Daud (or Daoud Khan) period. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.g. Sample inside front cover of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 15 September 2011.

_____. N.d.h. First of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.i. Second of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.j. Third of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.k. Fourth of four sample inside pages of a Tazkira booklet from the time of the Communist regime (white pages, military history). Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.l. Sample of an original Tazkira certificate. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

_____. N.d.m. Sample of an English-version Tazkira certificate. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Canadian High Commission in Pakistan on 6 September 2011.

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